

Collaboration as a Starting Point—Ashkui a Cultural Landscape Unit

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Abstract

Over the past several years, the Innu Nation, Environment Canada, the Gorsebrook Research Institute of Saint Mary's University and Natural Resources Canada have been exploring new ways to connect Innu knowledge and western science. Our approach uses the conceptual category of a Cultural Landscape Unit (CLU) as the basis for generating new knowledge about the biophysical make-up of Labrador. This method starts with Innu knowledge and terminology for an element of the landscape that has value and meaning for them and then builds a knowledge base of that feature from a number of perspectives. Our hypothesis is that a combined form of ecological knowledge can be developed that recognizes the qualities and limitations of Innu and Scientific knowledge systems and situates both within the specific context of the times they are produced in. Fieldwork conducted Innu from Sheshatshiu examined areas known as ashkui in the Innu language. Ashkui are areas of early or permanent open water on rivers, lakes and estuaries. The original concept for this initiative was developed at a planning meeting in Sheshatshiu hosted by the Innu Nation where the ashkui landscape element was identified by Innu elders as being of primary importance. Collaboration was the starting point of this research. Choosing our partners, and then determining the research direction has been one of the main contributions that this project can showcase as a focus.